



Episode 1x16:
"THE BIG STICK"

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Teaser

INT. TOWN HALL – COUNCIL CHAMBERS – DAY

The Town Hall has been converted into a makeshift church. SHEPHERD BOOK, at a podium, finishes his sermon to a crowd of fifty or so TOWNSFOLK.

BOOK

...When you give to someone, don't tell your left hand what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in secret, and your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you. Word of the Lord. Amen.

In the front pew is the LORD GOVERNOR, dressed in his Sunday finest, surrounded by the UPPER CLASS. The pews behind him are filled with PEASANTS and those less fortunate.

BOOK (cont'd)

And now let us consider our Lord's words as we sing the next hymn, and take a collection for those less fortunate than ourselves.

The collection plate is passed as the people SING "What a friend we have in Jesus" accompanied by an OUT-OF-TUNE PIANO.

The plate passes to the Lord Governor and he drops in a single coin with some disdain. The rich folk sing reserved, while the poor sing with smiles.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – DAY

Music, a CLASSICAL WALTZ, comes from the future equivalent of a PHONOGRAPH. SIMON and KAYLEE dance, just a little too awkwardly, since he's apparently teaching her the steps.

RIVER is nearby, mimicking them, dancing with an invisible partner.

SIMON

No, wait, your—

KAYLEE

That was your foot, wasn't it?

Simon nods and the two of them laugh and lean into each other. Kaylee begins to apologize, but the CARGO DOOR opens and in rushes MAL and JAYNE, followed by ZOE.

They're out of breath, lugging large canvas bags. Mal and Jayne are clearly in good spirits, and Zoe is watching their back.

The dancing stops, but the music continues.

KAYLEE
How'd it go, Cap'n?

Mal shucks his bags and heads to Simon, claps him on the shoulder.

MAL
Your plan worked perfect.

SIMON
(uncomfortable)
It wasn't a plan, Captain. It was a joke.

JAYNE
Still, Doc... If I didn't know better, I'd think you was some sorta criminal genius rather'n dandified pretty-boy.

WASH comes in, down the STAIRS from the kitchen.

KAYLEE
Jayne!

JAYNE
What? Said he was pretty, didn't I?

Zoe lays down her bags, walks to Wash.

SIMON
Captain, I really don't think Shepherd Book would be happy to know—

MAL
What Shepherd don't know won't hurt him.

JAYNE
'Sides, good book says the Lord helps them as help 'emselves.

RIVER
No, it doesn't. I checked.

Everyone ignores River. Zoe and Wash hug. Before Simon can protest further—

WASH

Did we get the goods? Will someone tell me we got the goods?

ZOE

We certainly got the goods, sweetie.

Jayne has put down most of his bags and now digs through one.

JAYNE

And them some!

He pulls out a huge fistful of GRAPES, beautiful and succulent. Kaylee and River are on him in a flash.

RIVER

Forbidden fruit!

WASH

We have food! Fresh food! Lord does help those who help themselves!

Kaylee takes a few grapes and wanders back toward Simon and Mal. River, mouth full of grapes, hovers near Jayne (well, near the rest of the grapes, anyway), chewing noisily.

MAL

(to Simon)

Look, son, it's better this way. Don't have to draw guns.
No risk o' hurt to nobody.

The music abruptly changes to a JAUNTIER TUNE. Wash, having just adjusted the future-phonograph, his cheeks full of grapes, shrugs at the crowd.

He holds out his hand to Zoe, who moves to him. They sway together to the music, more hugging than dancing.

Kaylee grabs Simon and they join them, with Kaylee leading, and Simon awkwardly – but enthusiastically – following the tune. This music is her world, not his.

River looks around excitedly, some disappointment on her face at having been left out. She turns to Jayne, who scowls... but, after a beat, he joins her in a crazy, wheeling jig. They're a comical couple, she small, slender, and smooth, he a lumbering hulk.

In the center of it, Mal breathes deep and for a moment, all is right with the 'verse. This is his ship, his crew... his family. It's a good day for Malcolm Reynolds.

MAL

Dance it up while you can, folks. I wanna be off this rock soon as Shepherd's back. Wouldn't do for his majesty the Lord Governor to wander home from a very fine sermon to find out what we done to his greenhouse... Not to mention his safe.

Wash looks up a little from Zoe.

WASH

Wave came from an old friend while you were out, Mal. Sounded urgent.

Mal nods and walks up the stairs to the CATWALK. He watches his crew dance until he almost slams into INARA.

INARA

Mal.

MAL

Inara.

There's a world of awkward between them. DOWN BELOW, no one seems to notice. Except Zoe.

MAL

Um... Grape?

Inara smiles a little, takes the grapes, and moves past without another word.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – DAY

Mal enters, stands for a moment, pensive. His day's not quite as good any more. He moves to sit, but—

ZOE (OS)

Sir?

He turns. Zoe's in the hall, just a few steps behind him, a look of mild concern on her face.

Mal leans against the doorframe.

MAL

It's nothin'... It's just...

Zoe waits.

MAL (cont'd)

Nothin'.

A beat. Mal realizes he's got to give her something.

MAL (cont'd)

We been runnin' on too little coin and too much trouble
for far too long.

ZOE

We sell the Lassiter, that'll solve half the problem.

MAL

Way folks been shyin' away from us, that don't look to be
happenin' any time soon.

Zoe gives a small "True enough" nod.

MAL (cont'd)

Truth is, we took more green than gold on this job. This
keeps up, I'm like to call Badger to see what he got.

ZOE

Sir, is that really a good idea?

Mal smiles brightly, deflecting any concern.

MAL

Best I check that wave. Might be it's Blue Sun tellin' me I
won their big lottery.

ZOE

Didn't think you gambled, sir.

Mal smiles; Zoe turns and leaves.

Mal throws himself into the pilot's seat and fiddles with a few dials, bringing up a wave. One of the SCREENS comes alive with an image of BERNABE. Mid-thirties, he's a little heavier than Mal, a little shaggier of mane, but considerably less world-weary. They two could probably pass for brothers, or at least cousins.

MAL

Bernabe, how've you been?

BERNABE

Mal! Been a dog's age since we've seen you around here.

MAL

Now, wait now. Dogs on your world have shortened life spans?

Mal leans back. It's good to hear from an old friend.

BERNABE

Maybe. Maybe so. Maybe we all do...

(a beat)

Could use your help, Mal. Have a job need's doing. Don't pay much at all, but I can promise three squares to you and yours as long as you like. Whenever you like.

MAL

You know I'd love to help you out, but I got more'n just mouths to feed—

BERNABE

Haven's pretty far out in the black, Mal, but it seems every day there's more trouble headed this way. Rumors of Reavers, pirates... Now slavers. Word is they hit Caridad last week.

MAL

Caridad? That ain't but a few moons away from you. Me and my crew, we ain't got but a few light arms...

BERNABE

Ain't lookin' for you to fight for us, Mal. We need pick-up and delivery of somethin' damned sight bigger'n a few pistols. A big stick to knock them birds right outta the sky.

MAL

Where's the pick-up?

BERNABE

Fort Liberty.

Mal grimaces. He's torn. He wants to help Bernabe, but...

MAL

Fort Liberty's more'n two days burn behind me. I don't know if I even have enough fuel—

BERNABE

We're on the way, Mal. You make it here, we'll fuel you up free. Before and after.

MAL

I don't know, Bernabe. I got a passenger with an awful urgent need to go in the opposite direction—

INARA (OS)

Captain? Do you have a clearer idea of when we'll be arriving at New Melbourne? I need to—

Mal turns. Inara is just entering the cockpit.

INARA (cont'd)

Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't realize you were on a call.

Mal offers here a tight smile.

MAL

No worries, Inara. Sorry to say we won't be at New Melbourne for a while yet. Just got a job going t'other way.

She's not happy, but also not surprised.

INARA

Of course you did.

Mal shrugs.

MAL

Business is business.

He turns to Bernabe, leaving Inara to glare at his back.

MAL (cont'd)

(to Bernabe)

Get that fuel ready. We'll be seein' you soon, Bernabe.



Act One

EXT. HAVEN – ESTABLISHING SHOT – DAY

Haven is a mining community of no more than two hundred citizens. It's dusty and small, but comfortable.

Haven's MAIN STREET comes by its name largely by virtue of being Haven's only street. It is essentially a broad concourse lined by a meandering conglomeration of dirty, LOW-ROOFED BUILDINGS.

Large pieces of MINING EQUIPMENT define the town's borders, and multiple TUNNEL ENTRANCES hint that there' may be a fair amount going on beneath the surface.

Serenity sits in a clearing outside the town limits.

EXT. SERENITY – DAY

The AIRLOCK RAMP is down. Bernabe and a half dozen FOLKS are there to greet Wash and Zoe as they exit.

BERNABE

Zoe! Wash!

His handshake with Wash turns into a heartfelt embrace, and then he gives Zoe a big hug. The others also offer greetings in a way that indicates that they, too, are familiar with the crew of Serenity.

ZOE

It's good to see you, Bernabe. Been far too long.

BERNABE

(kissing her hand)

You're more radiant than memory allows, Zoe.

WASH

(fake-offended)

Husband... Standing right here!

Bernabe laughs and gives Wash a friendly punch in the shoulder.

ZOE

What about your missus? Mildred around?

BERNABE

(shaking his head)

Been gone near a week. Took a supply run and blew out her engine on Beaumonde. Otherwise we wouldn't have called on you folks. She's got the kids with her, and is probably just this side of crazy right now.

ZOE

Kids?

WASH

As in multiple?

Bernabe smiles proudly.

BERNABE

Got us a little girl, now. Tess. I've got captures.

Bernabe pulls out some holographic "CAPTURES" to show to Wash and Zoe and our attention returns to:

THE RAMP

Where Jayne is strolling down, bag slung over one shoulder, VERA (his big gun) on the other. He scowls at the crowd.

Mal and Simon follow a few paces behind. As Jayne wanders away from the ship, Simon stops and turns to Mal.

SIMON

Captain, I understand River and me, but—

Jayne spits in the sand.

SIMON (cont'd)

Why does he have to stay?

MAL

Like I told you, Doctor, Fort Liberty's an Alliance military outpost. After Jayne's uncharacteristic heroics on your behalf on Ariel, could be he's every bit as wanted.

Mal starts to walk down the ramp, and Simon follows.

MAL (cont'd)

Folks here are afraid. Might make 'em happier to have an extra gun around. And folks come to Haven for lots of different reasons. Bernabe—

Mal points to Bernabe, who is talking animatedly with Zoe and Wash.

MAL (cont'd)

He's a good man, fought on the right side in the war. But some here ain't hidin' on account of they're all sugar and nicety inside. Could be you'll be more'n happy to have Jayne along.

RIVER (OS)

And we can trust him now.

Mal and Simon both jump as River comes up behind them. Kaylee tags along as well.

River looks straight at Simon.

RIVER (cont'd)

He cried wolf and the wolf came. Doesn't want to get bit again.

Mal ignores her and turns to Kaylee.

MAL

You get us fueled up quick, okay? We got us a schedule to keep.

RIVER

(still to Simon)

He doesn't want to buy more apples.

Kaylee nods to Mal, and Mal walks off. River smiles and skips down the ramp after him, leaving Kaylee and Simon alone.

There's an awkward beat.

SIMON

So...

KAYLEE

So...

SIMON

Have fun with the crime on Fort Liberty.

She laughs.

KAYLEE

Oh, I don't know if it counts as crime this time. Sounds like a simple pick-up job.

SIMON

Still... Be careful.

KAYLEE

(smiles)

You, too.

He takes a step closer to kiss her, but she leans in and gives him a near-sisterly peck on the cheek. Before he can embrace her she's pulled away.

Simon wipes his hands on his vest, not knowing what else to do with them.

KAYLEE

You take care of your sister, Simon.

She backs away.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
Gotta go. Fuel the ship up.

And with that, she's down the ramp, too, leaving Simon with a "What the heck just happened" look.

EXT. HAVEN – CONTINUOUS

By now, Mal has made his way over to Bernabe. The two men shake hands, and Bernabe waves in the general direction of Kaylee, who is at the bottom of the ramp and talking to the locals.

BERNABE
That the new mechanic? She's a damned sight prettier'n that "mechanical genius" you had last time you set down on Haven. That boy mucked up our filtration system so bad we had to shut down operations for two days.

MAL
Yeah. She's somethin' special, that girl. Keeps me sane.

BERNABE
So who's the one drives you t'other way?

There's a companionable silence between the two men as they watch the crew of Serenity and the citizens of Haven mingle.

By now, Inara and Shepherd Book have come off Serenity to join the festivities and are introducing themselves to folks. A few additional citizens have shown up, as well.

MAL
So it's just a simple pick-up you need, right?

Uncomfortable beat.

MAL (cont'd)
(sighs)
It's never simple.

BERNABE
Not that complicated.

MAL
Fill me in.

The two men continue to stand next to one another, watching their people.

BERNABE

There's a man on Fort Liberty, Bennett Hicks, a thief by trade, wants to start over fresh. He's contacted us a few times before, but I've been reluctant to let him come in...

MAL

...Because he might bring Alliance attention.

BERNABE

Exactly. But it turns out he can give us what we need in exchange for a fresh start. Says he has an inside man with the Alliance.

MAL

You trust him?

BERNABE

Remember the part where he's a thief?

MAL

So what do you want from me?

Bernabe turns away from crowd to look at Mal for the first time.

BERNABE

Your instincts, more'n anything. I didn't serve with you and Zoe, but I heard the stories.

He puts a hand on Mal's shoulder.

BERNABE (cont'd)

I trust you, Mal. What we need here at Haven's somethin' to keep us safe. If it ain't the slavers this week, it'll be Reavers the next. We need to be able to swat them bastards right down.

MAL

(smiling)

You'll get your big stick, Bernabe. Now where's those three squares you promised me?

EXT. SERENITY – SPACE – ESTABLISHING

Serenity flies through the black.

INT. INARA'S SHUTTLE

Kaylee sits down, making herself at home, while Inara prepares tea for the two of them.

INARA
Everything alright?

KAYLEE
I have a problem, 'Nara.

She's distinctly uncomfortable.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
A Simon problem.

Inara looks up from the tea, gives Kaylee an "Oh, please do go on" look.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
You might've noticed that Simon and me, we've been getting closer, recently.

INARA
(smiles)
I did. I've also noticed that planets seem to spin and gravity tends to hold things down.

Despite herself, Kaylee laughs.

KAYLEE
I don't want to speak for Simon—I never know what's going on in that boy's head—

INARA
—That's because he's a boy—

KAYLEE
—But I'm thinking that he wants to move things in a more intimate direction.

Inara hands Kaylee her tea and sits down across from her.

INARA
Kaylee, I'm fairly certain you don't need my advice. But if you ask nicely, I might be swayed into parting with a companion trade secret or two that would make the good doctor's toes curl.

KAYLEE
That's not it, Inara.

Beat.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
I don't want to.

Inara blinks. How did she not see this coming?

INARA
But I thought—?

KAYLEE
Yeah, I did, too. But I just... After that bounty hunter, I don't feel right inside.

INARA
He didn't...

KAYLEE
No, it's not like that. He didn't lay a hand on me, 'Nara. But he could've. He could've so easy. And I just haven't felt right since.

Inara takes a sip of her tea, ponders all of this.

INARA
Jubal Early might not have touched you physically, but he touched you mentally, emotionally. It's still assault. He made you feel unsafe in your home, here on Serenity.

KAYLEE
Right. I just don't feel safe. And I don't know how open I can be with Simon. I feel stupid.

INARA
Honey, there's nothing to feel stupid about.

She leans forward and puts a comforting hand on Kaylee's arm.

INARA (cont'd)
What you're feeling is perfectly natural. Simon is a good man. He'll wait. And when the time is right, it will be, well, right.

Kaylee shrugs and drinks some of her tea.

KAYLEE

Thanks, 'Nara. I'm just glad I have you here to talk to. I don't know what I'd do without you.

Inara tenses, but says nothing. She takes a long drink of her tea instead. Finally...

KAYLEE

So what's going on with you and the captain these days? I've been sort of noticing a... vibe.

INARA

There's no vibe.

KAYLEE

Wash says he thinks there's more looks between the two of you.

INARA

There are no looks! There's no vibe!

Abruptly, Inara stands up, practically leaping from the chair, and pours herself some more tea. With her composure a little more under control, she turns back to Kaylee.

INARA (cont'd)

More tea?

EXT. FORT LIBERTY – EVENING – ESTABLISHING

FORT LIBERTY is a small, tight looking walled city built up against the side of a low MOUNTAIN. Filled with sharp-edged, institutional-looking buildings, the place is certainly no Persephone, but it's still much more "civilized" than most places where Serenity sets down.

All in all, it has the feel of an industrial complex that sprang up to service a military outpost, which is exactly what it is.

Giant mounted CANNONS, with barrels ten meters long, dot the WALL that protects the city. Each cannon is manned by a uniformed soldier.

As Serenity flies in, one of the cannons tracks the ship.

INT. SERENITY – COCKPIT – NIGHT

Wash is settling the ship in, while Zoe and Mal stand behind him.

WASH

Ah, yes. Scenic downtown Fort Liberty. Where you can get arrested for breathing.

ZOE

Then maybe you should keep your mouth shut, honey.

WASH

Look, I'm just saying, Alliance military outpost, us... Is this really the best plan ever?

MAL

I'll get our man Hicks, he'll tell us where the package is, we'll get it, and be out of the world again and back to Haven in time for dinner. Simple.

WASH

I do like dinner at Haven. Mildred makes a great shepherd's pie—

ZOE

(to Mal, largely ignoring Wash)

I'm sure that's exactly how it'll work out, sir.

WASH

—even though I don't think she uses real shepherd in it. Still, we better keep an eye on Book.

MAL

(to Zoe, fully ignoring Wash)

In and out, Zoe. No problems.

He heads for the door.

ZOE

Want to pick up your lottery winnings while you're in town, too, sir?

EXT. FORT LIBERTY – STREET – NIGHT

The street is fairly crowded, and the CROWD is made up largely of laborers and off-duty military personnel.

Mal, careful not to make eye contact with anyone, squires Inara through the crowd. Not surprisingly, they're in mid-argument.

MAL

—am I gonna get you to New Melbourne? Oh, I don't know. Maybe the day after you finally 'fess up to the crew that you're leaving.

INARA

I'll tell them when I'm ready. When they're ready.

MAL

Seems to me you'll tell them about three weeks after I drop you off, rate you're going!

INARA

Which will be long after River is older and grayer than Shepherd Book at the rate YOU'RE going!

Folks are starting to look at the two of them.

MAL

At least I'm not living a lie!

INARA

No, you just don't tell people what they don't need to know!

MAL

Right! Just like you!

INARA

Right!

MAL

Right!

Beat. They realize they're gathering an audience.

Mal gives her a tight smile.

MAL

Maybe we should save this discussion until we're back on the ship.

She nods cordially to the passers-by who are looking at them, her demeanor full of "move along, nothing to see here."

INARA

You've certainly had worse ideas.

But Mal's looking past her—

MAL
Hey. We're here.

—to a blocky gray building with a sign that says, straightforwardly enough, "BAR."

INT. BAR – NIGHT

Mal and Inara are in the doorway of the bar. It's smoky, and crowded, and no one looks at them. This is the sort of place where you're probably better off not knowing what the guy at the next table is doing, or even looks like.

Unlike the street outside, no one here seems to be wearing military uniforms.

Inara looks across the room.

INARA
That your man over there?

MAL
(long-suffering sigh)
Seems about right.

Without another word, Mal starts to wind through the crowd.

ACROSS THE ROOM – CONTINUOUS

BENNETT HICKS is near the bar. He's in his late teens, gawky, awkward, with curly hair and a startled look on his face. The look most likely comes from the fact that he's being pushed up against the wall by a BRUTE, a large slab of muscle standing a solid 6'4" or more.

BRUTE
Told you, boy, our business is done when I say it's done!

HICKS
Listen, I—

MAL (OS)
Excuse me?

Hicks and the Brute turn to see Mal standing there.

MAL
(to Hicks)
Bennett Hicks?

Hicks, still pushed up against the wall, nods.

Mal isn't happy to hear that, but he's also not at all surprised. With a shrug he sucker punches the Brute in the face. There's a cracking noise as the Brute's nose breaks.

The Brute tumbles back, scowling and cursing, as Hicks falls to his feet.

The Brute takes a step toward Mal, but Mal shakes his head and sweeps back his coat, revealing the GUN he's got holstered there.

MAL

Don't.

The Brute, apparently, isn't as stupid as he looks. Sullenly, one beefy paw to his bleeding nose, he skulks away, melting into the crowd.

Inara comes up beside Mal.

INARA

Never a dull moment, Captain Reynolds.

Mal ignores her and turns to Bennett Hicks, straightening the boy's shirt.

HICKS

I know you?

MAL

Bernabe sent me. You have his package ready?

HICKS

Not yet, I—

Mal's not at all happy to hear that.

MAL

Well, get it ready, boy. I want to be packed up and off this planet 'fore anyone even realizes I'm here.

HICKS

There might be a problem, sir.

MAL

What kinda problem might that be? Bernabe told me you had a inside man could get you everything you need.

HICKS

I did. Gleason.

MAL

Did?

Mal winces. He sees it coming before Hicks hits him with it.

HICKS

I think you just broke his nose.

Hicks looks past Mal. Mal and Inara turn.

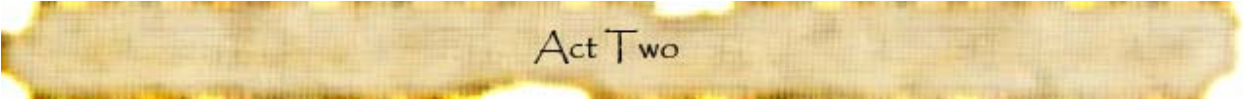
The Brute (GLEASON) returns... with three of his ALLIANCE BUDDIES. They are all sorts of angry.

HICKS (cont'd)

And I think he's come back to repay the favor...

MAL

<Of all the blasted space-sucking luck!>



Act Two

EXT. HAVEN – MAIN STREET – NIGHT

A LARGE TENT, expansive enough to seat nearly 50 comfortably, sits at the north end of Main Street, a blazing BONFIRE, at the south.

As Bernabe, Simon and Jayne walk away from the tent, folks behind them clean up after dinner.

SIMON

I must say, Bernabe, that's one of the finest meals I've had in a long time.

BERNABE

Got a garden up in the hills. Sissy Temkin stays out there most days, claims she can grow anything.

SIMON

I'm inclined to agree.

As the trio continues toward the bonfire, folks meander past, often offering some greeting to Bernabe, who nods or waves in response.

BERNABE

I'm just sorry we didn't have any meat for our fine visitors.

Jayne looks suspicious.

JAYNE

No meat? What the gorram hell was in the stew?

BERNABE

Mushrooms.

River rushes up to them, smiling and laughing. She's holding an APPLE, which she presents to Jayne by practically shoving it in his face.

RIVER

You've been good. You can have this. Here.

Jayne takes the apple, glares at it with distrust.

Simon glances at his sister, but does his best to ignore the interchange.

SIMON

Mushrooms?

BERNABE

You'd be amazed what we can grow in spent mineshafts.

Jayne sniffs the apple suspiciously, polishes it with his sleeve, all the time keeping a wary eye on River. He unsheathes his KNIFE and pierces the apple, apparently testing for a grenade, but does not eat it.

By now, the group is at the edge of the BONFIRE, where nearly two dozen folks are lounging, relaxing, and laughing. They shout greetings to Bernabe, and more than a few address the newcomers from Serenity by name.

BERNABE (cont'd)

And now that supper's over, it's time for the three Ds.

SIMON

Three Ds?

BERNABE

Drinking, dancing, and dessert.

Jayne and River are both excited.

RIVER

Dancing?

JAYNE

Drinking? And dessert? Gotta have me some words with Mal. We never get dessert. 'Cept on birthdays.

Bernabe addresses one of the men in the crowd.

BERNABE

Doane? A jaunty tune, if you please.

DOANE MULDOON, 30s, scrappy, wearing a ludicrous miner's helmet that looks like it might once have served double-duty as a bowl, pulls out a guitar and begins to play.

Some of the crowd dances while others circulate bottles and pieces of pie.

Jayne wanders off to join the crowd, and River looks at Simon, who gives her an approving nod. With that, she's gone in a flash, heading closer to Doane and the music.

Bernabe and Simon are left alone.

BERNABE

So you're Mal's doctor, huh?

SIMON

(guarded)

Yes.

In the background, Jayne has gotten his hands on a bottle of something. He offers the apple to a nearby citizen, who carefully pulls it off the knife.

BERNABE

And your sister...?

SIMON

Is just my sister. And a passenger. Is there any reason you need to know?

BERNABE

Just trying to make conversation, friend. Most folks here have things they don't care to talk about. But some come here to talk about those things 'cause they ain't got nowhere else to do it. No harm meant.

Simon nods, relaxes a bit.

The two men stand in companionable silence for a few beats. A citizen passes a bottle to Bernabe, who takes a swig then passes it to Simon.

SIMON

Oh, no, I couldn't.

BERNABE

Sure?

Simon looks around. The homey atmosphere is getting even him to loosen up.

SIMON

Why not?

He takes the bottle, downs a swig.

As he hands the bottle to a passer-by, his eye is drawn to the dancing crowd around the bonfire. Most folks have stopped dancing and are now clapping in time with Doane.

River dances alone, a creature of grace and beauty, collecting a crowd of fans. Most of the fans are men, and more than a few of them whistle.

River seems to drink in the attention, dancing with increasing abandon. The clapping continues, and she begins to reach out to the edges of the crowd, finally taking the hands of one of the MEN.

She dances with him for a few seconds, then passes to a new partner. In a frenzy of laughter and energy, she dances with a dozen men in a span of no more than half a minute. Until—

She switches partners and finds herself with Simon.

He grabs her by the shoulder, stopping her suddenly.

RIVER

You made the world stop spinning, Simon.

Simon puts a protective arm around her and pulls her away from the crowd, much to the chagrin of many of the men.

SIMON

That's enough for tonight. Let's go.

River looks back over her shoulder, smiling to her fans. Jayne happens to be among them.

RIVER

He didn't like the apple.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – NIGHT

Mal limps up the open ramp, Inara and Hicks (who has a beaten-up leather backpack) helping him. He's bruised and battered, and one eye is beginning to swell shut.

Zoe and Wash, apparently in the middle of some discussion, perhaps about cargo, look up.

MAL
(pained, mushmouth)
Pack up! We're leavin'!

ZOE
What happened, sir?

WASH
I don't see any cargo. Should there be cargo?

MAL
Ain't no cargo. Just a whole lotta hurt'.

HICKS
Captain—

Mal ignores him.

MAL
Wash, I want us out of this world. Now.

HICKS
Captain Reynolds—

ZOE
What about the job?

MAL
We ain't got one. Boy don't have the goods ready, and I ain't about to sit around waitin' to get nabbed by the local authorities. Who are awful unfriendly, I might add.

HICKS
Captain, this don't change nothin'.

MAL
Other'n my urgent need to get to my personal doctor to see to it that my nose grows back at a more appealin' angle—
(waves in Inara's general direction)
I got a passenger needs to get to New Melbour—

INARA
Mal!

WASH
We're going to New Melbourne?
(to Zoe)
Did you know we were going to New Melbourne?

Zoe gives him a "Shush, stupid" look.

INARA
We're not going to New Melbourne!

Awkward beat as no one knows what to say next.

HICKS
I swear, Captain. You still have a job. If you want it.

INT. BERNABE'S HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

The living room is small but comfortable. Four large chairs are crammed in, and Jayne sits in one of them, eating a large piece of pie. Vera is within reach.

Simon steps in from the DOORWAY that leads to a HALL.

JAYNE
Awful nice of Bernabe to put us up for the night.
'Specially after the way you <pissed all prissy-like> on
the town bonfire.

SIMON
She was drawing too much attention.

Jayne slowly chews his pie, talks with his mouth full.

JAYNE
That it, Doc? Or was she just drawin' a kind of attention
you don't like?

Simon says nothing.

JAYNE (cont'd)
She's your sister and all, and, sure, she's crazy as a
moon-faced wolf pup in heat—

Simon glares.

SIMON
Is this supposed to be helping in some way?

JAYNE

Look, Doc, you an' me, we know she's crazy, but to lots of other folks, she's just a girl.

Simon seems almost able to accept that. But Jayne, being Jayne, pushes things too far.

JAYNE (cont'd)

An' she certainly ain't ill-formed, if you know what I'm sayin'.

If looks could kill, Jayne would be dead five times over.

SIMON

That's my sister you're talking about.

Jayne grins.

JAYNE

Should make sure more folks know she's your sister. That's a reason an' a half for a man to stay away.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – NIGHT

Wash, Zoe, Book, Inara, Kaylee, and Hicks sit at the table. Hicks looks downright depressed.

BOOK

How exactly did this all happen, son?

INARA

Mal.

HICKS

No. Was my fault. Captain Reynolds was just tryin' to help.

Kaylee puts a comforting hand on Hicks' shoulder.

KAYLEE

That's our captain, alright. He ain't one to ask questions.

MAL (OS)

(nasal)

Hey! I'm standin' right here!

Indeed he is. Mal's in the doorway, apparently having skulked in sometime after the conversation started. His nose is braced with a bandage. Looks like he did it himself.

Wash opens his mouth, thinks better of it, and stays silent.

MAL (cont'd)

(to Hicks)

Look, boy, I'll take you to Haven. Bernabe, he's a reasonable sort...

ZOE

He won't turn you away.

HICKS

Might not turn me away, but he certainly ain't gonna pay me, I show up empty-handed.

MAL

Pay you?!? He's gonna pay you?

HICKS

Just room and board. For a few weeks. Til I find my place.

Mal is somewhat placated by that. Somewhat.

BOOK

There's another issue here beyond the boy, Captain.

MAL

What might that be, Shepherd?

BOOK

Seems to me you promised your friend Bernabe a package. Seems to me it's something he needs.

MAL

(points at Hicks)

He's the one can't deliver!

ZOE

Haven's a place we've always been welcome, sir. Not sure I like the idea of breaking with Bernabe over something like this.

WASH

Bernabe's a friend, Mal.

Mal still looks unconvinced. He stares at Wash, as if to say "Look at me. Look at my face!"

HICKS

Captain, even without Gleason's help, we can make this work.

Mal glares at them all, and motions for Zoe to follow him to the corner of the room. She follows him as the others watch from across the room.

MAL

(whispers)

Conjure Bernabe had an inkling somethin' like this might happen.

ZOE

(touching his bandaged nose)

Really? Bernabe must not like you much.

MAL

No, not my face. Told me to trust my instincts. Mine and yours. What do yours say?

ZOE

I think the boy's earnest, Mal.

Mal grimaces but nods.

MAL

I agree. Much as I mightn't want to.

He looks past her, back to the rest of the group.

MAL (cont'd)

Settle in, folks. Looks like we'll be at Fort Liberty at least a while longer.

Hicks is visibly relieved, and Wash smiles. Book offers a small nod to Mal.

Mal walks to the table and looms over Hicks, looking cold and hard as steel. His face is a frightening mask.

MAL (cont'd)

Now, you're the thief, boy, so this is your show. I ain't comin' up with no plan myself, and if you tell me something sounds like it's gonna get me and mine pinched, you're off this boat.

Hicks nods.

MAL (cont'd)

An' if you're playin' some game, you're gonna lose. *Dohn-lu-ma?* <Are we clear, here?>

HICKS

Perfect. I don't want to cross you, sir. Never much wanted to be a thief, but it seemed preferable to bein' starved. Got a second chance, and I don't see no reason to waste it.

Mal accepts that. For now.

HICKS (cont'd)

Plus, I have to admit that I am <elephant penis-sized feces> scared'a you right now.

INT. BERNABE'S HOUSE – BEDROOM – NIGHT

Simon wakes with a start.

He's sleeping on a cot, and the bed is empty, but the covers are rumpled. The room is small but comfortable, clearly Bernabe's and Mildred's, loaned out to their guests.

SIMON

River?

Simon looks around, gets out of bed. He hears VOICES, urgent but unclear, coming from the front part of the house.

INT. BERNABE'S HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Bernabe and Doane are near the door, which is open, talking.

BERNABE

You sure?

Jayne's in the same chair, but the pie is gone. He's dressed and fully awake, polishing a gun absently as he watches Bernabe and Doane.

River stands in the doorway from the hall into the living room, leaning on the frame, watching Jayne.

DOANE

Pretty gorram sure, Bern.

As Simon enters the room, he spots River watching Jayne and glares. He gently takes her by the shoulder, forcing her to walk with him.


SIMON
What's going on?

Everyone looks at him.

BERNABE
Just got word that slavers hit Archon Point.

DOANE
Good bet that we're next on the list.

BERNABE
Mal an' them don't get back soon, won't be anyone for
'em to come back to.



Act Three

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – DAY

Mal and Zoe sit at one end of the table, Hicks, with Kaylee nearby, at the other.

MAL
You had the night to think on it, Hicks. Dazzle me.

HICKS
Well, see...

He hesitates, looks to Kaylee for support. She gives him an approving nod, suggesting he should go on.

HICKS (cont'd)
I ain't a thief who's good at taking things.

MAL
Boy, that is not a confidence-inspiring beginnin'.

Hicks is flustered. Zoe gives Mal a "Let the boy talk" look, so Mal backs down.

HICKS
I'm good with computers... Systems and such. I ain't no
Mister Universe—

MAL
Who?

HICKS

—But I ain't half bad. So, see, I don't take things so much as I make 'em disappear. Livin' on Fort Liberty, so many supplies floating this way and that, it's always easy to make things be where you want 'em to be rather'n where they're supposed to be.

Mal leans back, crosses his arms. He's waiting for more.

HICKS

Secondary targets're easy. I just hit a button and they'll be delivered right here to us.

MAL

Well ain't that fancy?

ZOE

Could be we want 'em delivered somewhere else. Draw less attention.

Hicks nods.

HICKS

I can do that, too.

MAL

How 'bout the, you know, the big target?

HICKS

Even that wouldn't be bad under the right circumstances.

MAL

Which I'm guessin' these ain't.

HICKS

Target's protected by a security network. We want to take the target, get away clean, network's gotta come down.

KAYLEE

And to take the network down, we need an inside man.

MAL

Which we don't got.

(to Zoe)

I love this plan already.

ZOE

Doesn't sound any worse than most of yours so far, sir.

KAYLEE

Me and Ben, we figured this part out last night.

Hicks brightens when she uses his first name. Clearly, the boy has a bit of a crush on Our Miss Frye. And, really, who wouldn't?

HICKS

We do have an inside man.

MAL

We do? Who?

HICKS

You.

MAL

(to Zoe)

Still no worse than mine?

ZOE

No, sir. Not yet.

MAL

(to Hicks)

Do you see my face? You're lookin' right at me! How am I—

Wash rushes in, drawing the attention of everyone in the room.

WASH

Got a complication, Mal.

MAL

Don't we always?

WASH

Just got a wave from Bernabe. They're pretty sure the slavers are on their way to Haven. We don't leave Fort Liberty tonight, we might as well not make the trip back there. Hell, the slavers make best speed, they might beat us back even if we leave now.

A beat as Mal processes that.

MAL

(to Hicks)

What do we need to do to get this done?

Hicks looks distinctly uncomfortable.

HICKS

Timetable you're talking about, you'd need a miracle.

BOOK (OS)

Would you settle for a preacher?

Book has come into the dining room from the other side. He nods to Mal. Mal gives Hicks a look of challenge.

MAL

Best you plan on that miracle.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – DAY

Hicks has made the exercise corner of the cargo bay his own. His leather backpack is open and the contents are strewn about. He has all manner of cobbled-together GIZMOS and GADGETS, most of them with a homemade look and wires sticking out of them. They're the Serenity version of high-tech gadgetry.

Hicks sits on the exercise bench, looking more comfortable amid his equipment than he does when talking to folks.

The crew, including Book and Inara, stand in a half circle facing him.

HICKS

This...

Hicks holds up a DATACARD.

HICKS (cont'd)

(to Book)

...will get you inside.

Book takes it, scrutinizes it. Mal looks over his shoulder.

MAL

How's that gonna work?

HICKS

Datcard contains the itinerary for Commodore Jeremiah Peck, weapons inspector for the Alliance. He's to pay a visit to Fort Liberty tonight.

MAL

Great. Another complication. Don't we have enough o' them?

BOOK

No, Captain. If I understand the boy correctly, I believe I'm to be Commodore Peck.

Mal gets it. He nods.

HICKS

You and your aide—

(points to Zoe)

Will pay a visit to Fort Liberty Central Security.

Book looks self-conscious in his preacher's garb.

BOOK

Not dressed like this we won't.

HICKS

Won't have to. Fella named Feng, runs the laundry where the uniforms get cleaned, is dirtier'n the clothes that come in. For a few coin, he'll loan two out to us.

Hicks looks at Inara.

HICKS (cont'd)

Heck, if a pretty enough lady smiles at him right, he might not even charge.

Inara nods. She's on it.

ZOE

What about guards? Even with the security network down, won't there be a guard at the target?

Kaylee holds her hand out to Book. He gives her the datacard.

KAYLEE

Ben here's a genius, I think. There's a program on the card, when they plug in to check the good Commodore's creds, it'll gum up the Fort's roster.

HICKS

You go in right before the shift change, no one'll be sent to spell the guard when he leaves. Target's wide open.

KAYLEE

Soon as the security network's down, Wash flies us in right over the target, I'll shore up the winch before we go and we'll be in an' out quicker'n a greased cat.

Wash looks at Zoe.

WASH
(mouths)
Greased cat?

Zoe ignores him.

HICKS
Which is good, because I give it twenty minutes, half hour tops, 'fore some tech spots what we done to the roster'n does somethin' to fix it.

ZOE
So once Preacher and I're in, how do we shut down the security network? Might be your noticing we're not technical wizards like yourself and Kaylee.

Hicks picks up a palm-sized COOL GADGET, and slots a different datacard into it.

HICKS
You get within a yard of the primary security core, flip this switch right here, this little piece of sweetness'll do the rest.

BOOK
There's no need to plug anything in? This will just interface directly with the core? Clever.

HICKS
Thank you, sir. Light goes red when you turn it on, yellow when it's running, green when it's done. Simple.

KAYLEE
Just don't get let 'em catch you usin' it. 'Cause they'll probably be sore. And have guns.

WASH
Sore and guns. Never a good combination.

Mal nods to the crew and the crowd disperses to begin their part in the operation. The captain and Book are left alone.

MAL
You okay with your part in this?

BOOK
It's a solid plan, Captain. Should work.

MAL
Not what I asked, Shepherd.

Book's face is unreadable.

BOOK
The job needs doing, son.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – NIGHT

Wash and Kaylee have apparently just finished shoring up the winch, and are tugging the line, experimenting with it. Kaylee has tools lined up all around the CARGO BAY DOORS.

Across the room, Hicks is fiddling with some of his gadgets, but also casting periodic moon-eyes Kaylee's way.

Mal comes in, sweating and breathing heavy, dragging behind him a HOVER-PALETTE laden with crates.

MAL
(to Hicks)
Everything was there, boy. Just like you said.

Wash rushes over to help Mal, who nods appreciatively and leans against a wall to catch his breath.

KAYLEE
Everything go okay?

MAL
Would've gone a damned site better if that mule were in functionin' order.

He motions to the MULE, a small cargo-hauler that's currently a burned out husk in the corner.

ZOE (OS)
Everything alright?

Zoe and Inara have entered the cargo hold.

Zoe is dressed in her stolen Alliance uniform. She looks uncomfortable, but fierce, all military and power, like some sort of Fascist Amazon Warrior Princess.

WASH
Wha-huh.

Zoe gives him a puzzled look.

WASH (cont'd)

Can we keep it? The uniform I mean?

ZOE

What?

WASH

For one night?

Zoe blushes and laughs.

INARA

I have a question, Ben. Once they realize what we've taken, won't they come after us? Hard?

Hicks ponders that for a beat.

HICKS

Once we're in the air, I'll send a wave or two, make them think Gleason's at fault. I'm fair sure his superiors're suspicious of him as is.

WASH

Are we okay with that? Framing him?

HICKS

(shrugs)

Gleason's a bad man.

MAL

(motioning up)

No. I believe we've found our bad man...

Backlit and sinister, Book stands on the CATWALK above, dressed in an Alliance uniform, cap and all, managing to look both completely comfortable and totally ill-at-ease at the same time.

He looks like he was born to wear the uniform, but would rather die than admit the fact.

BOOK

How do I look?

Act Four

EXT. HAVEN – MAIN STREET – DAY

FOLKS run in every direction, in a bit of semi-organized chaos. An evacuation of sorts seems to be in progress.

Jayne walks against the crowd, checking Vera.

Simon, wandering within the crowd, finds himself face-to-face with Jayne.

SIMON

Any word from the Captain?

Jayne shakes his head no.

JAYNE

These folk really think they can hide in them mines?

SIMON

It's their best chance, I suppose.

JAYNE

Heard they's got a few shuttles hidden somewhere. We should "borrow" one. Could be off-planet when things turn red. Captain'd pick us up in a few days...

SIMON

You're not suggesting we abandon—

JAYNE

Didn't say it was what I's gonna do, Doc. Said it was what we SHOULD do. If we was smart.

It dawns on both of them that River is there, barefoot, watching.

RIVER

(to Simon)

Like I said. We can trust him now.

EXT. FORT LIBERTY SECURITY CENTRAL – NIGHT – ESTABLISHING

Security Central is a bunker built into the side of a small mountain. It's a fenced-in military installation, and the front blast-doors are protected by two of the large guns that surround the city.

INT. FORT LIBERTY SECURITY CENTRAL – FRONT OFFICE – NIGHT

The room is small and utilitarian. An OFFICER sits at a desk, which is in front of a heavy looking door. He's fiddling with something on his computer.

Two GUARDS, armored and armed with rifles, flank the door.

Book and Zoe stand in front of the desk, dressed in their disguises. Book is doing a tremendous job of selling the commodore act. He has a sneer of bored disdain on his face and looks like he'd kill the Officer soon as shake hands with him.

OFFICER

Everything seems to be in order for your visit, sir... If you'll just give me your datacard, I can pass you right through.

Book hands over the card with an annoyed sigh.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – NIGHT

Mal and Inara sit at the table.

INARA

They'll be fine, Mal.

Beat.

MAL

Should be there my own self.

INARA

Mal, you can't always—

Hicks rushes in.

HICKS

They should be in by now.

Mal stands.

MAL

(to Hicks)

Tell Wash to prep.

INT. FORT LIBERTY SECURITY CENTRAL – HALLWAY – NIGHT

A GUARD leads Book down the hall, Zoe trailing behind them.

BOOK

—am quite sure the level of incompetence I've already seen will continue when I review your records. Your man kept me waiting nearly four minutes. FOUR MINUTES! I understand that Fort Liberty is a <useless peasant> drop-off point in the middle of nowhere, but I'd think that you would have a little more respect when you wear that uniform!

Even Zoe looks like she's beginning to feel bad for the Guard.

BOOK (cont'd)

Don't you know who I am? I should not be kept waiting for a single minute, much less four!

They arrive at a large door with "COMPUTER ROOM" stenciled on it. The Guard looks very relieved.

GUARD

We're here, sir.

INT. FORT LIBERTY SECURITY CENTRAL – COMPUTER ROOM – CONTINUOUS

The computer room is large, roughly the size of Serenity's cargo hold, but filled with banks and rows of machines. It looks like a NASA command station, although largely unmanned. There are six TECHS on duty, as well as two GUARDS, who snap to attention as Book storms in like he owns the place.

The PRIMARY SECURITY CORE, which is a tower of cables and spinning reel-to-reels, is in the center of the far wall.

Book stalks through the room, stopping periodically to look at this console or that, more than once running his finger over a screen as if testing for dust. In general, he appears increasingly annoyed and highly disapproving.

Zoe follows him like a loyal puppy.

Book stops for a beat in front of the primary security core and gives her the briefest of nods. She sidles up to it and stays there.

Book struts back toward the center of the room.

BOOK

Who's in charge here?

One of the Techs (BAGGETT) nervously stands and salutes.

BAGGETT

Watch-commander Baggett, sir.

Book approaches Baggett.

BOOK

Watch-commander Baggett...

With all attention trained on Book, Zoe slides her hand down to her belt and slowly pushes the button on Hicks' COOL GADGET, which is clipped to her belt like some sort of utility item.

A tiny RED LIGHT flares up.

BOOK

(to Baggett)

Where were you raised?

BAGGETT

Sir?

BOOK

('don't test me')

Where were you raised?

BAGGETT

Sinhon, sir. Shendao Province.

Book sighs.

BOOK

I find that quite surprising, Mister Baggett. Based on the way you manage your watch, my assumption is that you were raised in a barn. Or a cave. Or perhaps in a den of wolves, sucking at the hind tit of a bitch?

Baggett flinches.

All eyes are on Book as he walks closer still, running a finger along one of the consoles.

Zoe risks a glance at the cool gadget. The light is YELLOW.

BOOK

This dust is well beyond the acceptable level for an Alliance computer facility. Are you aware of how much damage one mote of dust can cause to such delicate machinery?

BAGGETT

No, sir. Er, I mean, yes, sir.

Book is now nose-to-nose with Baggett.

BOOK

Imagine a grain of sand in your eye. A single grain.
Imagine you cannot remove it, and no tears will come.
How much damage will that single grain do to you in the
span of a blinking week? A blinking day?

Baggett blinks and looks down.

Book circles around Baggett and glances at Zoe.

She looks down. Light's still yellow. She shakes her head "No."

BOOK

Just because you've been assigned to the ass-end of the
'verse does not give you the right to behave like a
savage, Mister Baggett. You are an Alliance officer.

BAGGETT

Yes, sir.

BOOK

Shall I list the protocols you've broken in my brief visit
here? There are seventeen. I fear by the time I reach the
fourth, your <pathetic excuse for a little mind> will have
shut down.

Zoe looks down. GREEN.

She reaches urgently for her FUTURE CELL PHONE, also on her belt, pretending to
have received a call.

BOOK (cont'd)

Six-oh-oh-five-oh-one. Failure to properly address a
superior officer. Three-three-two-one-two-two. Improper
use of—

ZOE

Sir?

Book glares at her.

ZOE (cont'd)

Priority call from the port. Seems some locals tried to
break into the shuttle. I can look into it myself if you—

BOOK

No.

Book circles back in front of Baggett and eyes him.

BOOK (cont'd)

I believe I've seen enough here.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – NIGHT

The lower CARGO DOORS are open, and wind rushes in. Mal, near the edge, is strapped into a harness connected to the winch. As Inara stands near, Kaylee makes last minute adjustments to his harness, and hands him a set of GOGGLES.

MAL

(completely doubtful)

You sure this is safe?

KAYLEE

We strap in Jayne all the time.

Not what Mal wanted to hear.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

Maybe you should have a hat. Jayne always has a hat.

INARA

Mal, be careful. You can barely stand.

MAL

Nothin' to be careful about. If Hicks did everything right, there shouldn't be no guard anyway.

INARA

Still—

Hicks runs in, onto the upper CATWALK.

HICKS

Zoe sent the signal. Security network's down. We're headed in!

EXT. FORT LIBERTY – GLEASON'S CANNON – NIGHT

Gleason sits at one of the giant cannons, looking completely bored.

Suddenly, Serenity WHOOSHES overhead. It continues along the wall to the next gun down the line.

GLEASON

What the—? That little <mouse turd> is still going through with it!

Gleason abandons his post and chases after Serenity on foot, running along the top of the city wall.

INT. FORT LIBERTY SECURITY CENTRAL – HALLWAY – NIGHT

Book and Zoe follow a GUARD down the hall. The guard is far enough ahead of them that they can speak freely (in low tones, at least).

Book barely holds it together. He looks queasy, sick.

ZOE

Preacher...

Book's head snaps in her direction. He looks guilty. He's expecting the inevitable comment along the lines of "Funny how a preacher knows such things..."

ZOE (cont'd)

I'm not even gonna ask.

EXT. FORT LIBERTY – UNMANNED CANNON – NIGHT

Mal is lowered down from Serenity above. He finds his feet near the empty cannon, and attaches the cables that lowered him to the gun in a half dozen places.

He slips black goggles over his eyes, lights a CUTTING TORCH and begins his work cutting the gun free.

When he's almost finished, he hears the THUD OF BOOTS running his way. He raises the goggles and sees Gleason, his nose in a bandage as well.

MAL

(under his breath)

Like lookin' in the mirror...

(to Gleason)

You again! Haven't we tussled enough?

GLEASON

Me stopping you – That's the kind of heroics that'll get me off this wall!

Gleason roars and runs at Mal, who lowers his goggles and raises the torch.
Gleason screams, blinded, as Mal follows up with a kick to his chest.

Gleason flies back and tumbles over the wall. The fight is over before it began. Mal climbs onto the gun.

MAL
(yelling up)
Kaylee! We're clear!

The cables connected to the cannon go taut. There's a SCREAM of protesting metal as it begins to tear free.

As Serenity takes off, Mal and the cannon hanging below, Mal looks down to where Gleason lay in a broken heap.

MAL
(wincing)
Ouch! Not like lookin' in the mirror no more...

EXT. HAVEN – MAIN STREET – NIGHT

A half-dozen armed folks, mostly men, mostly hard-looking, wait nervously, along with Jayne, Simon, River, and Bernabe. Otherwise, the settlement is deserted.

JAYNE
(to Bernabe)
Soon as they set down, we'll start shootin'. Fall back and drawn 'em to the snipers and traps. 'Course, they decide to strafe the street, might as well just shoot yourself.

SIMON
(to River)
I wish you'd gone to hide with the others, River.

RIVER
The fruit wasn't really forbidden, Simon. No need to hide.

Doane approaches the group.

DOANE
One of the signal buoys just detected multiple incoming vessels.

EXT. SPACE

FIVE SLAVER SHIPS cut their way through space, looking sinister and gothic. The DUNGEON SHIP is five times Serenity's size, slow, laden, as if weighed down by the many slaves it carries.

It's surrounded by four OUTRIDERS. These mismatched ships are smaller than Serenity, and fast. They bob and weave like a pack of wolves protecting the dungeon ship.

They approach Haven, the light of the system's SUN glinting off their dark hulls.

Then, out of the bright sun's glare, comes SERENITY, placing herself in the slaver's path, her nose dipped lower than usual.

Two of the outriders surge forward.

INT. SERENITY – COCKPIT – SPACE

Wash, at the controls, stares straight ahead as if he can make the outriders back down by not blinking. Mal stands calmly behind him.

MAL
Now.

WASH
No.

Beat.

WASH (cont'd)
Now.

EXT. SPACE

On, the OUTRIDERS come. SERENITY flips up, showing them her belly.

ANGLE ON:

The CARGO DOORS, which are open. The CANNON is winched in so that it would be pointing straight down. Or, more to the point, so that it is now pointed directly at one of the outriders.

Zoe, manning the cannon in a SPACE SUIT, fires.

One of the outriders silently explodes.

Zoe can't do much more than point and shoot, so she waits as Wash aims the ship for her.

She fires. The second outrider arcs, the the cannon's shell passing wide of the mark, and retreats to the dungeon ship.

The slavers peel away from Haven.

EXT. HAVEN – DAY

Kaylee and some of the citizens of Haven are finishing mounting the cannon on the outskirts of town. Mal, Bernabe, and Hicks watch from a safe distance.

MAL
(to Hicks)
You done okay, *di-di* <little brother>. You wanna fly on my boat again, I think I'd be okay with that.

HICKS
Sorry about your face.

MAL
Faces heal. Broken promises don't.

Hicks smiles.

BERNABE
Can't thank you enough, Mal. Don't think we'll have to worry about slavers or Reavers anytime soon. Reckon it'd take a full-scale Alliance warship to get past this thing!

EXT. HAVEN – GIANT TENT – DAY

The crew of Serenity and the good folks of Haven share a meal. There's food aplenty, and more than enough smiles and laughter to go around. (This scene is done without dialogue).

Everyone's there except Book.

Mal and Inara share a laugh, as do Hicks and Kaylee.

Kaylee says something to Simon, but he barely responds, because he's glaring at Jayne, who's sitting a little too close to River for Simon's tastes.

Wash and Bernabe laugh with Zoe, clearly mocking her about something. She laughs, then looks serious for a moment as she scans the crowd...

INT. SERENITY – HALL OUTSIDE THE PASSENGER DORMITORIES

Zoe knocks on Shepherd Book's door.

ZOE
Preacher? You in there?

Beat.

BOOK
Yes.

ZOE
Folks're asking after you, Shepherd. Want to thank you for the part you played. Couldn't have done it without you.

BOOK
(strained)
Be there straight away, Zoe. Just finishing a short prayer.

Zoe looks at the closed door. She doesn't necessarily accept that, but what else can she do?

EXT. HAVEN – GIANT TENT – DAY

More laughter and fun. Now Doane is playing his guitar. Inara and Mal dance, as do River and Jayne.

Kaylee tries to get Simon to join, but when he refuses, Hicks steps in.

Wash dances with... Bernabe?

Zoe rejoins the group, laughing at the sight of her husband and their friend cavorting like morons.

INT. SERENITY – BOOK'S ROOM – DAY

Book sits on his bed, alone, shoulders hunched, dressed once again in his preacher's garb.

The CAP of the Alliance uniform is clutched tightly in his hands.

Shepherd Book, looking very tired and very old, sobs quietly.

BLACKOUT